

table impediments that stood in the way of opening up my heart to that very special person.“

There was a small pause, as if Don Michele had been slightly embarrassed. Then, with downcast eyes and an almost broken voice, he continued: **“I had to stifle my sentiments. I should not have shown the opposite side of my soul, believe me. Against my own will, I tried to fight my most real feelings and, to cover myself, I preferred to show disrespect, even mock the dear creature, offending perhaps the innermost sentiments of that poor heart. I only hope that that kindred, magnanimous spirit perceived the real reasons of my offensive moods. I had to act that way, really I had to do it, even if my own heart dictated otherwise, alas...”**

Iago could not believe his own ears. Yet, he graciously waited for Don Michele to sob a little, anxious now to hear more of what the young knight had to say

• **suck out of you** = succhiarvi fuori • **jolly badfellowship**= fantastico piacere (*bedfellow* = compagno di letto, amante) • **belittle myself** = sminuirmi • **fiery mare** = cavalla in calore (*fiery* = ardente) • **steed** = destriero • **wantonness** = sfrenatezza • **satiate** = saziare • **with downcast eyes** = a occhi bassi • **to stifle** = soffocare, trattenere • **mock** = farmi beffe (*to mock* = canzonare) • **perceived** = percepisse • **offensive moods** = modi offensivi • **to sob** = singhiozzare•

Michele raised his voice to a sufficient pitch and let it run quite clearly behind the closed door, where he guessed - well, where he knew - that Emilia was attentively listening to all he was saying.

“That woman did not take much time to discover my new affections. She did not want to lose me, or the allurements of my body. She tried first to tie me to her, with more caresses, with secret gifts, with special pledges. Look, among the many tokens of love which were given to me, I received even this beautiful personal handkerchief. You will surely recognize it as belonging to Donna Desiderata...” and putting the embroidered small piece of linen in Iago’s hand, continued his story :

“But when after all Dedé realized that my mind could not be changed, she herself turned to menaces. She became a fury, threatening to expose me to her husband, to have me imprisoned, should I not relent. You know, Don Iago, how powerful she is, how terrible she can be. Nevertheless I did not change mind, so her vexations grew in intensity day after day. Today, I was suddenly summoned to her rooms, where I was confronted with the alternative of either giving up my new feelings or to give up my own life. When again I refused, her fiery stomach showed itself in bitter invectives first, then in terrible blows, to which I could not reply in kind, as it is ungentlemanly to beat a woman, as you know. She

has sworn a terrible oath that, before two days pass, I will hang from the battlements of the castle on a trumped up charge, while the person I would not betray will be utterly ruined. She will see to it herself, she said. I ran away before her husband arrived, fearing not just for my own life....”

• **pitch** = tono di voce (lett. culmine) • **allurements** = allettamenti, attrattive • **pledges** = pegni • **tokens of love** = prove d’amore • **small piece of linen** = piccolo pezzo di stoffa (lett. = lino, ma anche biancheria) • **relent** = cedere • **vexations** = irritazione (to vex = infastidire, contrariare) • **my new feelings** = i miei nuovi sentimenti • **her fiery stomach** = le sue voglie furenti (stomach = stomaco, ma anche passione, animo) • **ungentlemanly** = scorretto (lett. poco signorile) • **battlements** = spalti • **a trumped up charge** = un’accusa falsa, montata (to trump up = escogitare, architettare ai danni di qualcuno) •

Here Michele stopped, looking straight in Iago’s face, which was growing more and more perplexed and befuddled. Then, he continued:

“I fear, my honest friend, that now I have been left holding the wolf by the ears. Should I go to Don Metello himself and disclose the whole affair, I would surely kindle the fearsome anger of a betrayed husband. Should she accuse me of some unforgivable misdeed - as I am afraid will happen too soon - she would be believed instead of me. I have no choice but to run for my life. I could even run to the Great Turk for sanctuary, or hide myself in remote valleys or wild moors, where time stands still, and be forgotten. But... but I must first warn a person. Even if I remove myself forever from her sight, you know quite well, Don Iago, that she will feign innocence but will look at revenge through her fingers, aiming at that powerless soul with eyes burning with envy and jealousy. I know well that of all the liars of the world, the worse are our own fears. But I am awfully afraid that something could happen to that dear person. I must warn him, I must. I have no choice, and my heart compels me. You surely know, by now, who is that special person who should be warned, my dear, dear friend. Thus, I remit myself wholly to your fraternal consideration, don Iago, and to your most human decency. You will not desert me, I am sure.” and with a sudden movement he rose from his chair and limped to Iago, clasping the man to his bosom, very tightly, for some time. In a highly emotional voice, broken by held-back tears, he finally said :

“The Devil sunders us, my comely Iago, but God knits us together, forever” and unexpectedly kissed the ensign so warmly and intensely that Iago for a moment believed that all Don Michele had told him that night was utterly true. He even felt the gap from the missing front tooth in Don Michele’s

mouth. Then, the young knight darted out of the room and swiftly disappeared, with his limp, in the pitch dark of the little alley outside. He was never to be seen again at Agrocastro - or so, at least, everybody believed.

• **perplexed and befuddled** = perplesso e confuso (*to befuddle* = stordire (specialmente col bere) • **holding the wolf by the ears** = a cavalcare la tigre (lett. = a tenere il lupo per le orecchie) • **fear-some** = terrificante • **misdeed** = misfatto • **the Great Turk** = il Gran Turco, cioè il Sultano • **sanctuary** = santuario, altare, ma anche rifugio, asilo • **wild moors** = lande (lett.= brughiere) selvagge • **feign** = fingere, simulare • **compels me** = mi costringe • **desert me** = mi abbandona • **clasping ... to his bosom** = stringendo al petto (*to clasp* = agganciare, affibbiare, ma anche afferrare) • **sunders** = ci separa (*to sunder* = dividere) • **knits** = ci unisce (*to knit* = congiungere, attaccare, ma anche lavorare a maglia) • **utterly true** = assolutamente vero (*utter* = completo, assoluto) • **darted out** = sfrecciò fuori (*dart* = dardo) • **his limp** = il suo zoppicare • **the pitch dark** = buio assoluto (*pitch* = pece) •

Iago was left standing in his nightgown, barefoot on the cold stones of the floor. In his hand still kept the handkerchief, while in his mouth still lingered the sweet, musky taste of that unusual masculine kiss. He did not know what to think, so he slowly sat backdown at the table. He remembered somebody saying that violent dislikes often betray secret sympathies, but still could not fully make sense of Don Michele's strange tale. Iago sat there for some time, until the little lamp gradually flickered off. Then he stood up and went to bed, where Emilia was feigning sleep. But Iago could not sleep at all; when he realized from her unnatural breathing that the woman was awake, without saying a word he stood up and started beating her, strongly and methodically, indifferent to all her crying and sobbing. When he had beaten his wife thoroughly, he sent her to sleep on the old straw pallet in the lumber-room. Only then did he fall asleep in his bed. Early next morning, at the first opportunity to sneak away from home, Emilia ran to Dedé, as expected. Among abundant tears she spit forth all that she had heard the previous night, recriminating and reproaching pathetically her lover. Dedé was greatly upset, of course, when she heard the slanderous story. It was a most vile attempt at dragging her honour through the mud; her own reputation was now at stake. Yet, her hands were tied, since no public accusation had been made. Dedé knew that, should Iago speak, her name could be cleared easily; there was no doubt about it. But she also knew good and well that, regardless of the truth, she would at once become the laughing stock of the whole garrison, a promiscuous lady who tried to compete, and lost hands down, against the charm of a good-looking man. What if the rumour, even if unfounded, reached Venice through the many ramifications of the social grapevine? Her respectability would be merrily shredded to minute slivers and she would be left to glue together the few remainders.

• **lingered** = rimaneva (*to linger* = indugiare, trascinarsi, fermarsi) • **musky taste** = sapore muschiato • **sat backdown** = si risedette (*backdown* = retromarcia, ritrattazione) • **betray** = tradiscono • **flickered off** = si spense tremolando (*flicker* = guizzo) • **feigning sleep** = faceva finta di dormire (*to feign* = fingere, simulare) • **unnatural breathing** = respiro non naturale • **sobbing** = singhiozzare • **old straw pallet** = vecchio pagliericcio • **lumber-room** = **ripostiglio** (*lumber* = legname, roba vecchia) • **to sneak away** = scivolar via • **spit forth** = sputò fuori • **slandorous** = calunnioso • **dragging her honour through the mud** = trascinare nel fango la sua onorabilità • **was at stake** = era in gioco (*stake* = palo, ma anche scommessa) • **the laughing stock** = lo zimbello (lett. oggetto di ridicolo) • **a promiscuous lady** = una donna facile (lett. una signora promiscua) • **hands down** = facilmente (lett. a mani basse) • **social grapevine** = rete di pettegolezzi (lett. la vite con i suoi viticci che si abbarbicano dappertutto) • **to glue** = incollare •

On the other hand, if Iago kept silent, she would live forever with the distasteful knowledge that the stupid fellow could now look down at her, even feel patronizing and put up airs. She mainly resented the fact that nothing could be done about it, at least for the time being. She did nothing, therefore, but grind her teeth at what she recognized as Don Michele's revenge, thinking only how to come out of that debasing situation. Unfortunately, Dedé did not think it would be necessary to open up to her husband. Since the rape incident, relationships between them had cooled down noticeably. Gone were the previous confidence and the mutual warmth and camaraderie that once made their marriage tick so well. If not distrust, at least a cold feeling of muted disapproval and mutual recrimination had trickled down their souls and was now keeping them apart and distant. Moreover, Dedé did not cherish the idea of having to discuss with her husband her new liaison with the young Emilia, which would be inevitable in a truly open, heart-to-heart discussion. It was a difficult thing to explain and she was sure that he would not have understood. Consequently, Dedé did not clear the air with Metello about this unsavoury situation, and thus unwittingly planted the seeds of suspicion into an already fertile ground.

• **feel patronizing** = trattarla con condiscendenza, guardarla dall'alto in basso • **grind her teeth** = digrignare i denti (lett. macinare i denti) • **debasing** = degradante, avvilito • **made ... tick so well** = faceva funzionare così bene (*to tick* = ticchettare, funzionare come un orologio) • **trickled down** = venute fuori a poco a poco (*to trickle* = gocciolare, scorrere) • **did not cherish** = non le garbava (*to cherish* = aver caro, prediligere) • **heart-to-heart** = faccia a faccia (lett. cuore a cuore) • **unsavoury** = disgustosa (lett. insipido, ma talvolta anche nauseante) • **unwittingly** = involontariamente, senza volerlo •

Don Metello, in the meantime, had been approached by his faithful Iago. The handsome subordinate reported very confidentially the confession that Don Michele had made to him before disappearing. He glossed on his indirect in-

vovement in the affair, of course, deeming it too private and of little interest to Don Metello. Instead, he insisted on the young knight's torrid love affair with Donna Desiderata. Iago had his reasons: with the wife-swapping experiment he had tried to gain some ascendancy over Don Metello; but things went bust and he found himself caught in his own trap. Dedé had taken full control of the situation, with Iago forced to be on his best behaviour, least she pull her strings and have him demoted. But now, if he played all his cards well, Iago could eliminate Dedé's influence over Don Metello and perhaps even take her place as the power behind the screen. Or so he hoped. Therefore, the adultery story was duly emphasized, lurid details were discreetly added, the woman presented as an equivocal temptress, the handkerchief produced as a very private pledge, an evident pawn of a shameless love affair. Metello, already beset by half-hearted regrets and full-hearted doubts, was inclined to give sufficient credit to Iago's story and Iago glossed his commandant's doubts with a little private encouragement of his own.

• **deeming** = ritenendolo • **wife-swapping** = scambio di mogli • **things went bust** = era andato male, era fallito • **caught in his own trap** = preso nella sua stessa trappola • **least she pulled her strings** = altrimenti avrebbe fatto le sue mosse (lett. tirato i fili) • **have him demoted** = l'avrebbe fatto degradare • **power behind the screen** = il potere nascosto, l'eminenza grigia (lett. il potere dietro la tenda) • **pledge** = promessa (d'amore) • **pawn** = pegno • **beset by** = tutto preso da (lett. assediato) • **glossed** = passò sopra (*to gloss* = lucidare, ma anche mascherare)•

However, Metello first attempted a clarification with Dedé, although a clumsy one. He confronted her with the handkerchief :

“Madam, do you know how this handkerchief came in my possession? “

Dedé answered coldly :

“No, I would not know, but thank you anyhow for retrieving my hanky, Metello.”

“The young Cassio was in possession of this handkerchief of yours. How did he get it?”

“Ask him yourself. I genuinely do not know how Don Michele got it. Surely, not from me. I only know that there are some stupid stories going around, and I trust you are not so stupid as to give them credence and offend me...” but here Dedé realized to have perhaps said the wrong thing.

“How can you already know those stories, Dedé? They were told only late last night and only to one person, who told me.”

“Rumours and gossips are always buzzing around like dirty flies. I have already gotten wind of the worst. What's so strange about it? Stop making a fool of yourself, Metello.”

Of course Metello did not believe her and pressed on with rabid questions about what Don Michele was doing in her room the previous afternoon, what had happened there, why Don Michele had to be bandaged, why he had now disappeared from the castle. Dedé refused to submit to that sort of inquisition, claiming that such insinuations were highly offensive, more like a witch-hunting trial than a discussion between husband and wife. She demanded an apology. Tempers were dangerously flaring up, when unexpectedly Metello stopped his shouting and icily took his leave. He sent for Iago and together they went for a furious walk on the beach.

• **clumsy** = goffo, senza tatto • **hanky** = fazzolettino (diminutivo familiare per *handkerchief*) • **buzzing around** = corrono in giro (lett. ronzano intorno) • **have ...gotten wind** = m'è giunta voce (*to get wind* = venire a sapere, avere il sentore di qualcosa – lett. aver vento circa qtc.) • **witch-hunting** = caccia alle streghe • **an apology** = una scusa (*to apologize* = chiedere scusa) • **tempers** = gli umori (lett. caratteri) • **flaring up** = infiammarsi • **icily** = gelidamente •

By now, Metello was fully convinced of his wife's guilt. Anger was cutting his entrails like a sharp sword, making him bleed inside. Bitterness, pain and fury were burning him like a fire high and strong, consuming both the marrow with the bones - just to use Don Michele's own metaphor. And it was a scorching fire, that left only smoke, ashes and soot where happiness and joy reigned before. For hours the two men discussed wildly and fiercely what now had to be done. Wrath was blinding Metello's reason, greed and ambition sharpened Iago's wit; a dangerous combination. Together, they increasingly excited and provoked each other, in a frenzied and deranged escalation, shrieking and cursing that bloody woman, seeking bloody revenge at all cost.

It is true that a thousand curses never tore a shirt, but soon things were to get out of hand. If, at first, threats like ***"I'll kill the shameless whore that troubled me so much"*** were merely venting very deep frustrations and wild resentments, gradually they started to assume a true, and even feasible, ring. Iago was manipulative only to a certain degree. By now he was seriously involved in the personal sorrow of his beloved commander. He too urged revenge and challenged Don Metello to show himself a true man. He was offering his heart and his hand to rid his boss of that woman and cleanse the man's honour once for all. The wise and the fool do usually little harm, they say. It's the demi-fools, average weak men like Metello or Iago, who must be feared when they come under too heavy a pressure. It did not take much before they convinced themselves of the absolute necessity to eliminate the cause of such grief. To kill her was their only hope, for "stone dead have no fellows" as they say to each other.

Nothing calms so well as a decision once taken. The two men started discussing the various details of the work that had to be done, walking slowly in the evening, along the rhythmic small splashes and the foamy puddles of the waterline. Some seagulls were shrieking peacefully above them, while the sky was tinged with the red of a beautiful winter sunset.

• **cutting his entrail** = gli lacerava i visceri • **a scorching fire** = un fuoco bruciante • **wrath** = l'ira • **a frenzied and deranged escalation** = un rabbioso e pazzo crescendo • **a thousand curses never tore a shirt** = mille minacce non arrivano neppure a rompere una camicia (vecchio proverbio per: non basta minacciare, bisogna passare all'azione) • **shameless whore** = puttana svergognata • **venting** = lasciar sfogare • **assume a true and even feasible ring** = suonare accettabili e persino fattibili (lett. avere un anello di verità e di fattibilità) • **challenged** = incitò (lett. sfidò) • **to rid ...of** = sbarazzarsi di • **stone dead have no fellows** = chi è morto si dà pace (lett. il morto stecchito non ha più comparì - vecchio proverbio per: una volta che è morto, non c'è più da preoccuparsi) • **splashes** = spruzzi • **foamy puddles** = pozze piene di schiuma • **waterline** = bagnasciuga • **seagulls** = gabbiani • **were shrieking** = stridevano • **was tinged** = si era colorato •

At the castle too tempers were gradually subsiding. For most of the day Dedé had been out of herself, fuming with rage, swearing like a trooper, cursing Michele Cassio, her husband, the bastard Iago and men in general. The poor Emilia was running after her, wailing and twisting her hands, unable to bring any relief or solace to her friend. In the end she run for help to the only other woman at the castle, La BucoNéro. The old whore was used to the ways of the world and, by long direct exposure, knew how to face other people's marital problems, relying on a combination of old wisdom and softspoken words :
“Anger and spite only shorten your life, Donna Desiderata. You know that in every marriage, happiness comes and goes like the tides of the sea. A happy marriage is a union of two good forgivers, they used to say in Venice. So, please, my good lady, turn over the bucket and let the dirty water flow away with your sorrow. Don't be too harsh on Don Metello. Remember, every fish has its bones and every man has his faults. You could have been saddled with a much worse husband, believe me. Most women do not have a dog's chance when it comes to marriage. Instead, you can still be the mistress of yourself. Take it in good spirit, therefore. Straight is straight, and cannot be straighter. Now, now, give us a good smile, my dove. The shadow will only fall behind you if you turn your face to the sun, as my mother was fond of saying. So, take heart, my dear woman. If you really want to show your teeth to someone, it is much better to smile, Donna Desiderata, because when the wise get angry, they lose their wisdom. Anger begins with folly but ends with regret.”

• **fuming with rage** = fumando di rabbia • **swearing like a trooper** = bestemmiando come un soldatuccio (*trooper* = soldato di cavalleria) • **wailing** = piangendo (lett. piagnucolando) • **solace** = conforto • **spite** = rancore • **like the tides** = come la marea • **turn over the bucket** = volta pagina (lett. rovescia il secchio) • **too harsh** = troppo dura • **saddled with** = essersi accolata (*saddle* = sella) • **do not have a dog's chance** = non hanno scelta (lett. la possibilità di un cane) • **streight is streight, and cannot be straighter** = è così, non si può cambiare (lett. ciò ch'è dritto è dritto e non più essere più dritto di così) • **was fond of saying** = usava dire • **the wise** = la gente saggia • **regret** = rimpianto •

Dedé was a very sensible woman and in her heart knew that the old tart was essentially right. She herself often used to say to her own brothers - now she recalled - that they couldn't solve a quarrel by making a row about it. Eventually, people must sit down at the same table and solve their problems. She had some problems on her hands and a solution had to be found, not a compromise. Gone were the honeymoon days of *Othello* and *Dedemona*, their old endearment pet-names. They both had to come down, now, to the business of living, not always pleasant, not always gay. It would not be easy, but it could not be impossible, with a little goodwill from each sides. Probably, they both needed a break. She wanted to go back to Venice for a while, by herself, back to the old life, to family, to some dear friends. Only then would it be possible to weigh how important Metello really was to her. Yes, she would return to Venice for an extended holiday. The thought cheered her up. She now realized how much she missed the busy life of the Brabanzi palace, the parties, the brilliant people she used to meet, the business to attend to, the visits to make, the pleasure of having new fashionable dresses made, to show off during the service at church, the pleasure of wearing jewels again. She was tired to eat tunny, squid, octopus, like the Greek fisherwomen of Agrocastro. She longed for the good food of home. Ah, to taste again a good dish of beans with fresh bacon... Slowly, among endearments, caresses and pampering by Emilia and the BucoNéro, she recovered most of her serenity.

• **the old tart** = la vecchia puttana • **making a row** = litigare, far baruffa • **endearment pet names** = nomignoli affettuosi • **gay** = qui veramente nel significato originale di 'gaio', cioè felice, affettuoso • **to weigh** = soppesare, valutare • **extended holiday** = una lunga vacanza • **fashionable dresses** = vestiti alla moda • **tunny, squid, octopus** = tonno, calamari, polipi (considerati a quel tempi solo dei rustici cibi per poveri) • **beans with fresh bacon** = fagioli con prosciutto d'annata • **pampering** = blandizie (*to pamper* = vezzeggiare, indulgere) •

“Don't let the sun set on your anger, my dear lady” suggested again the old BucoNéro. Dedé agreed: she would talk to her husband that same evening, thrashing out all those big and small problems that had grown up be-

tween themselves, like useless weeds in a ripe cornfield. But Metello did not come back for dinner. It was already late when Dedé sent the two women home. She waited a little longer, then went to bed. First thing in the morning she would talk to Metello. Sleep came easily, as it was usual with her. In the middle of that night, Don Metello and Iago came back to the castle. They had waited until everybody had retired, to avoid unwanted witnesses. Iago, however, was extremely tense and fear made him breathe heavily. He had never killed anyone in a cold blood before. But Metello did not hesitate. He had become Othman again, used to the intrigues of a cruel and blood-splattered court. When they noiselessly arrived at the door of the bed chamber, Metello left Iago outside and entered the room alone. In the dark, he could see the shape of his wife's body under the crumpled white bedspread, snoring very softly. Quietly, he took a pillow and with a sudden movement pressed it over Dedé's head. Metello pressed strongly but had not taken into account that Dedé was an even stronger woman. She was awake in a flash and reacted immediately. With one hand she threw away the pillow, while striking with an iron fist straight into the face of the aggressor. The blow crashed upon the aristocratic curve of the beaky nose of Don Metello, who uttered a deep, painful cry, while a red spout of warm blood splashed all over his face. The man cried, pressing his hands over his poor broken nose.

• **let the sun set on your anger** = non lasciare tramontare il sole sulla tua rabbia (vecchio proverbio) • **thrashing out** = facendo piazza pulita (lett. trebbiando via) • **useless weeds in a ripe cornfield** = come inutili erbece in un campo di grano maturo • **unwanted witnesses** = testimoni scomodi (lett. non voluti) • **blood-splattered court** = in una corte (quella del re suo padre e del suo fratellastro) tutta insozzata di sangue • **crumpled ... bedspread** = la coperta spieazzata • **snoring very softly** = russando leggermente • **in a flash** = in un lampo • **striking with an iron fist** = colpendo con un pugno di ferro • **beaky nose** = naso aquilino • **spout** = zampillo • **stammering** = balbettando • **with a gasp** = trasalendo (*gasp* = sussulto, rantolo) •

Hearing the shouting, Iago ran into the room stammering : **“Did you kill her?”** **“Kill me?”** cried Dedé still confused by the sudden attack, hardly believing what she was hearing. Then, with a gasp, she recognized the two men and...

S T O P !



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You can decide what would be a meaningful sequence of events
in this story, given the facts so far.

Let your mind run free and enjoy the fun of making up a good ending.
Just think how you, or people you know well, would react in a similar situation.

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and try to put yourself in the shoes of the characters of this story.

Then, write up a good, interesting, acceptable conclusion.

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nothing literary,

nothing stylish;

just the plot.

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